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Marine Science Professor Testifying in Sacramento Feb. 22 About Ongoing Cal Poly Research into Fishing, Environmental Issues

SAN LUIS OBISPO – Cal Poly Marine Science Professor Dean Wendt will testify before the state legislature in Sacramento on Feb. 22 about the impacts that federal Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) are having on the ocean environment.

Wendt, associate dean of Cal Poly's College of Science and Mathematics, is acting director of the university's Center for Coastal Marine Sciences and executive director of the center's SLOSEA research program and Central Coast Collaborative Fisheries project.

He was invited to speak before the state legislature's Joint Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture's 39th Annual Fisheries Forum on Feb. 22 in the State Capitol at the request of committee chairman Wesley Chesboro (D-North Coast).

For the past five years, Cal Poly professors and students in the SLOSEA project have been monitoring MPAs and the impacts they're having on fish populations, fishermen and the local economy.

The SLOSEA project joins the professors and students as well as Moss Landing Marine Laboratories with more than 500 participating fishermen and 15 recreational and commercial fishing boats. The boats and crews are based in five harbor communities from Half Moon Bay to Port San Luis.

Participating students and professors sail with fishermen, measuring, weighing, and noting the species of fish caught and species counts within and outside of MPAs. "This project is involving our students in research that is solving real-world environmental and economic problems," Wendt said.

Since 2005, SLOSEA project participants have spent more than 19,000 hours on the ocean and caught, tagged and released more than 30,000 fish within and outside of Central Coast MPAs.

The data they have collected so far is serving as a baseline portrait of the Central Coast's marine ecosystems. It can also be used to estimate total numbers of fish present in the area.

The industry-science partnerships are important to fishing communities, Wendt said; under California's Marine Life Management Act, fishing is automatically restricted on species for which there is not enough data or when fishing stocks decline.

"The fishermen are the citizen scientists in this area," Wendt said. "They know a lot about what's going on out there. The data that we

in academia are gathering through SLOSEA by working with the fishermen is vitally important. We need to know what's actually happening in and around the MPAs."

SLOSEA is funded by the California Sea Grant program and the Ocean Protection Council; both agencies recently awarded a \$720,000 grant to Cal Poly's Center for Coastal Marine Sciences to expand the project.

For more details on SLOSEA and its MPA research, visit the SLOSEA web site at: <http://www.slosea.org/>

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